

Ahmed: Don't scapegoat needy

DHS site helps bust 'myths' on public assistance

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From the recent media coverage about the state's welfare programs, it would seem all recipients are a drain on the system.

The reality is that today, more than ever, the people who are receiving benefits from the Michigan Department of Human Services are your family members, friends and neighbors. They are people who are truly in need of temporary help.

Just this week, representatives from 20 agencies and organizations stood with me at a Lansing event to bust myths about welfare.

But why do we even need to bust myths?

There are many myths and misconceptions about who receives help, what that help does, the requirements for receiving that help and the department's role in providing it.

That's caused a stigma that may prevent some people who truly need help to seek it, especially families with young children and the elderly. We want to put a stop to that.

We are taking a stand to educate people on what welfare really is, who receives it and the direct impact it has on the individual or family and the economic impact it has in the local community. I encourage you to visit www.michigan.gov/welfare101 to learn the truth about welfare.

Unfortunately, our relatives, friends and neighbors have recently been the victims of virulent and discriminatory attacks, some from their own legislators, because they need temporary assistance from the state's safety net programs.

The same safety net that was created to help families make ends meet and get them back on their feet again, not to lump them all together for public humiliation and sound bites.

In fiscal year 2009, more than 2.5 million people in Michigan - more than a quarter of the state's residents - received at least one of five welfare programs. That includes cash, food, medical, state disability or child development and care assistance because of unemployment, home foreclosure, child or adult abuse or neglect, or for another reason.

Thousands more used benefits or services related to energy assistance, adult and child abuse or neglect, foster care or adoption, home help services or something else.

The average family receiving assistance is a single parent with two children. And they receive help for a short time, typically for less than two years. Certainly, it is not for a lifetime.

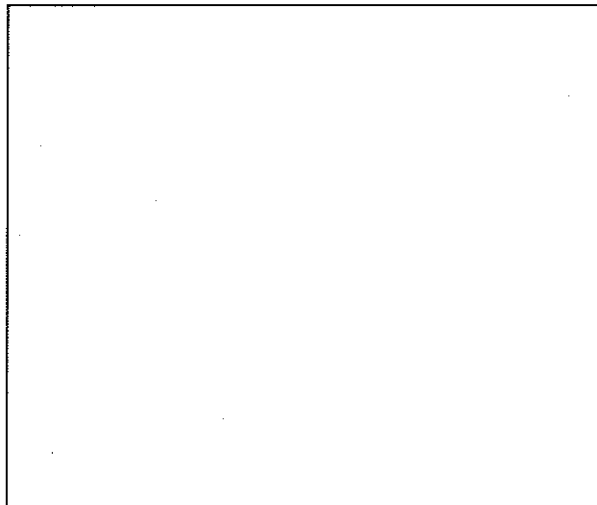
The parent in that family probably works part-time earning minimum wage or is searching for a job to maintain their benefits. Between part-time income and benefits, the family may live on \$700 to \$800 a month. This places the family at about 50 percent of the federal poverty income guideline for a family of three of about \$1,526 a month.


Drain on the system? Consider that myth busted.

The DHS remains committed to serving the state's vulnerable children, adults and families. And to busting myths about welfare so that those who are struggling during these tough economic times will feel they can get the help they need.

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